IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Digital Repository

Volume 39 | Issue 2 Article 1

1977

A Look at Veterinary Technicians

James E. Seaton
Iowa State University

A Look at Veterinary Technicians[1]

by
James E. Seaton*

Veterinary technicians should actually be termed "animal" technicians, although the paraprofessional vocation is most generally associated with the veterinary profession. Other situations where animal technicians are employed include biological research at various laboratories, drug and feed companies, animal production facilities, and others. It should be emphasized that the animal technician serves primarily as an assistant to senior biological workers, technologists, and other scientists, as well as to veterinarians. According to the AVMA House of Delegates, July, 1976, an animal technician is: ". . . a person knowledgeable in the care and handling of animals, principles of normal and abnormal life processes, and in routine laboratory and animal health care procedures."[1] Here again, the AVMA states that the technician is primarily an assistant to veterinarians, working under their supervision.

This viewpoint is shared by schools offering a program in animal technology. They hold the position that animal technology in no case should be practiced as an independent venture, but in association with a professional situation. For example, Michigan State University includes technicians in clinical training with professional veterinary students to emphasize the important role that an assistant technician can perform in a "team" effort. The programs at each respective school provide training in various areas to augment the capabilities of the veterinarian.

The training ranges from a two-year associate degree program to a four-year program resulting in a bachelor's degree and the accepted title of animal technologist. The two year program is by far the most common and the accepted title of its graduates is animal technician. The basis of the two year program lies in laboratory techniques and procedures such as radiology, clinical pathology, microbiology, urinalysis, and other related clinical areas. Emphasis is placed on technique in these areas. Surgery assistance, anatomy, physiology, hospital management, and some form of practical clinical training are offered to various degrees in the respective schools. Another area of training basic to the two year program is in office procedures and communication. This provides competence in office management, receiving clients and patients, record keeping, and other office-related functions.

The AVMA has established guidelines for these training programs in broad terms, allowing the flexibility required by a growing and changing vocation. In general the guidelines list the following as essential to a successful program: being a part of an accredited institution of higher education, an ethical manner of training, adequate equipment and facilities in keeping with the number of students, standard admission requirements, and a system of graduate evaluation provided by the school. The AVMA also lists a recommended general course outline and suggests that at least one veterinarian should be employed as an instructor in clinical sciences or in a supervisory capacity. The example of the Michigan State program and the fact that nearly all schools with an animal technology program list include a D.V.M. as director reflect this position as being widely respected. Along with the listing of schools having animal

*Mr. Seaton is a first year student in the College of Veterinary Medicine.

technology programs, the AVMA lists each school as being accredited or non-accredited. Nineteen of fifty-four programs appear as accredited but inclusion in the list of programs accredited in no way implies either approval or disapproval of the program by the AVMA.

Competition for admission to these programs is keen and each applicant is screened carefully. The basic entrance requirements include high school graduation or equivalent, with acceptance to the general university program. General aptitude, character, background, SAT or ACT scores, and experience in the field are also considered. Variations in requirements include the use of an interview board (4 of the 5 schools contacted utilize this feature), letters of recommendation, and handwritten autobiographies with an accompanying photograph of the applicant. The competitive nature of the screening programs was emphasized by each school contacted and specifically illustrated by Michigan State, which reported that over 300 applications were received for the 35 available positions in their program.

The role of animal technicians in the field of veterinary medicine has been outlined by definition and their scope of training, and is mediated by state and federal practice acts that govern other nonveterinarians. Technicians are not trained or qualified to perform diagnosis, surgery, or prescription of treatment and their duties shall not include these, according to law. The animal technician functions as an assistant under the direction, supervision, and responsibility of the veterinarian. Several schools indicated that state practice laws have been changed to allow technicians to perform all non-professional activities for which they have been trained, and others are rapidly moving in that direction.

Within the limit of the law, animal technicians can function in various useful capacities. As an assistant in the area of clinical sciences, the technician provides skills to accumulate relevant data for the D.V.M. to use in diagnosis and prescription of treatment. This decreases the amount of time spent with routine technical tasks. Another important area of assistance offered by the technician is in office procedures. This would include tasks such as receiving clients, general bookkeeping, purchasing and maintaining supplies, and fee collections. These tasks direct a large amount of time and effort away from professional duties, thereby reducing the amount of services available to client and patient. In the area of animal care and handling, the technician is qualified to perform all duties and has the ability to manage the care and handling under the supervision of the D.V.M.

As well as previously mentioned abilities, animal technicians are trained to assume many other duties immediately upon entering the practice or hospital. This is very desirable for a veterinarian who has little time to provide intensive training to an untrained employee. Also, the technician has already demonstrated aptitudes, ability, desire, and background for the veterinary profession in general, due to screening processes employed by the respective school programs.

The demand for animal technicians has increased with growing awareness and receptivity in the veterinary profession. According to Colorado Mountain College, over 80% of those graduates actively seeking employment are now employed in veterinary practices. Michigan State contends that its graduates are sought after to the extent that more job openings are available than graduates to fill them. All schools contacted feel that a period of intensive growth in the paraprofession is just beginning and will continue for some time.

In summary, the animal technician possesses excellent training, background, and ability designed to facilitate the veterinarian and his practice. Utilization of the technician should increase the amount of time spent with patient and client, and generally increase the productivity of the practice or hospital. These proposals seem to be substantiated by the increasing employment of technicians throughout the profession.

More specific information on training programs, placement services, and graduate availability is available upon request from the respective schools.

1. Adopted by AVMA House of Delegates on July 21, 1974.

REFERENCES

AVMA Schaumburg, Ill. 60172
AVMA House of Delegates, July 21, 1974
AVMA House of Delegates, July 18, 1976
Colby Community College, Animal Technology Program
1225 South Range, Colby, Kansas 67701
K. Beeman, D.V.M.
Colorado Mountain College, Animal Health Technology Program
W. Campus, Glenwood Springs, Colo. 81601
S. R. Vanderhurst, D.V.M.
Michigan State University, College of Veterinary Medicine
Animal Technology Program, East Lansing, Mich. 48823
Harold W. Knirk, D.V.M.
Medical Institute of Minnesota, 2309 Nicolett Avenue
Minneapolis, Minn. 54404
E. L. Pavek, D.V.M.
Texas A&M University, College of Veterinary Medicine
Biomedical Science, College Station Texas 77843
*4 year program, baccalaureate degree

"Osteochondrosis in Swine"

Charles L. Martin*
David L. Graham, B.Sc., D.V.M., Ph.D.†

Summary

Osteochondrosis is a well defined clinical syndrome causing acute lamenesses of sudden onset in European swine, especially the European Landrace. It is characterized as:

(1) following familial lines.
(2) occurring primarily at 6-12 months of age.
(3) relating to certain conformations.
(4) unrelated to stress or nutritional levels of calcium, phosphorous, Vitamin A, Vitamin D, and protein.
(5) occuring in fast growing swine. Those with the genetic ability to grow and/or high-energy rations.

With the emphasis presently being placed on soundness in the American swine industry, producers are showing an increasing interest in finding out why lamenesses occur instead of just marketing the animals involved. Several animals seen at the Iowa State College of Veterinary Medicine in the past few months have shown typical clinical signs and post mortem lesions as described in European literature. Osteochondrosis has probably been a problem in the American swine industry for years, but is only now being recognized and should be considered in the differential diagnosis of acute lameness conditions in swine, especially those of breeding age.

Osteochrondrosis is a generalized condition occurring in many joints of the body including those of the limbs and vertebral column, and even involving costochondral junctions, olecranon, and ischial apophyses. The term is presently being applied to a number of poorly defined "leg weakness" syndromes in swine. These syndromes are characterized by acute lamenesses usually in 6–12 month old animals and can be very costly to the swine producer. It is most common in the forelegs. The major difference between the syndrome in Europe and that seen in the United States is the age of onset. In Europe the condition is commonly seen in swine 4-7 months of age while in the United States it is primarily seen in 6-10 month old pigs. The reason for this is not completely clear, but Dr. Jerry Kunesh (Iowa State Ambulatory Clinic) points out that many

* Mr. Martin is a fourth year student in the College of Veterinary Medicine.
†Dr. Graham is a professor of Veterinary Pathology.